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Research journal article: 'Urban Cultural Intermediaries: reflections on pedagogy and creativity in the urban economy'

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FINAL DRAFT

Abstract

This article is a critical reflection on a creative practice course module that runs each year in the City of Coventry. The module aims to develop student skills appropriate to the creative and cultural industries, while maintaining an emphatic radical dimension in raising the students' social consciousness on the urban context of their skills development. Between 2016-2018 the module attracted funding in order to enhance its strategic approach to creative pedagogy through research and a revised module structure. This article charts this development, and articulates the broader critical implications of using "creativity" in higher education. Students were cast as "cultural intermediaries" in knowledge production – exhibiting and debating in public the outcomes of urban research. This article is not a detailed evaluation of the project, which given its complexity is not possible in one article, but identifies the limits and fault lines of an intended development of a critical pedagogy for students in the urban cultural economy.

Key words: creative pedagogy; urban culture; creative economy; intermediaries; student research.

Introduction

This article is a critical reflection on an internally-funded reconstruction of an elective module in the MA in Arts, Enterprise and Development in the Centre for Cultural and Media Policy Studies, University of Warwick, UK. The module is entitled 'Culture and Social Innovation' and delivered in the summer term (May and June) of each year. As its title suggests, it devises practical responses to the evolving and now popular discourses of social innovation (and social entrepreneurship: see Murray, Caulier-Grice, 2010; Boyer, Cook and Steinberg, 2011; European Commission, 2013). However, while the now global discourse on Social Innovation offers very useful models of team work, problem-formulation and strategic project management, students are

invariably less attracted to innovation models of social intervention and change than "creative" practice – using more obvious (or historically codified) processes of artistic creativity in social contexts. This article will not attempt to evaluate the full spectrum of the project's outputs (the debates, events, exhibition or final evaluation stages) and nor its governance (its use of a stakeholder group as well as a moderator, the Tom Fleming Creative Consultancy, London), nor reference to the many other impressive MA course modules in the UK that attempt a similar engagement with their City and industries. This article's purpose, rather, is as a self-reflective critique of the discursive articulation of the project – the critical-intellectual issues it generated in the process of forging a creative pedagogy with civic impact. It will so offer a critical reflection on the fault lines and possible limits of a symbiotic relation between pedagogy and "creativity" and student expectation it generated, that the module would afford them a range of skills appropriate to the commercial side of the creative industries.

The module is an elective, often with a cohort of between 15-20, and is particularly attractive to international students. The year 2016-17 saw ten students participate, as the project aimed for a smaller, more cohesive, team unit. All students were undertaking academic (not creative practitioner) degrees, and were international and Home/EU (the international hailed from the Middle East, Caribbean and S.E. Asia). An initial aim was to use the project in devising an "inclusive" format for a module — admitting non-University participants from the City and extending the social value of education. In the event 'inclusion' extended only to ad hoc social interaction with City artists and students of Coventry University — an open participation format became legally problematic on account of routine strictures on risk, health and safety, and the contractual terms of university course enrolment.

The project began in the autumn of 2016 with contextual research and interviews. Funded internally by the University's Institute of Advanced Teaching and Learning (IATL), innovative pedagogy was a central strategic aim, animated by the City of Coventry announcing an intention to bid for the UK City of Culture 2021 accolade, framed by a new City cultural strategy and

extensive investment in cultural development (Coventry City: <http://covculture.com/>). The structure and subject of the project was as follows: the module was a standard 10-week module, whereby the students were introduced to the cultural-institutional landscape of the City and its artists and curators, and then presented with a detailed project brief. The brief demanded (a) field research in the City (weeks 2-6); (b) the public presentation of the gathered (and analysed) research material in the form of a contemporary art exhibition; (c) a further public event, which offered a forum for public debate on the exhibition (weeks 6- 9); and (d) a post-project evaluation that, in turn, could form the basis of a cultural policy intervention (or policy statement at least) within the City's growing cultural agenda (week 10).

In terms of its subject, the project defined an active role for students (for reasons outlined in the following sections) as "urban cultural intermediaries". The project's object of research was defined as "mobile creativity". Both these were a neologism, albeit the former betrays an obvious source in the discourse emerging from Bourdieu (see Section Two); the latter concept was entirely speculative insofar as it emerged from the tutor's experience of the City in which "mobile people" (international students, international cultural workers, refugees and migrants, or even tourists and visiting business people) play a large if unacknowledged role in the City's urban culture. The "mobile creative" was cast by the module brief as a form of cultural agency deserving recognition; as neither citizens or residents of the City, they are not counted as official stakeholders in cultural policy frameworks (which, of course, presuppose constituencies and beneficiaries in terms of citizen-residents). "Mobile creativity" therefore served as much as a hypothesis as an object of research: in the context of the new Coventry Cultural Strategy 2017-27, the project's research served to charter the limits of cultural participation and the boundaries of the infrastructure-resource nexus of territorial expanse (who is inside and who is outside of the City's official culture).

This article is in three parts: the first part discusses the broader theoretical context on creativity in higher education (hereafter HE); the second part

attends to the project's preliminary research, which conceptualises the subject and object of the project; the third part defines the project's strategic pedagogy, and this article so concludes with general critical reflections on the role of creativity in HE courses of this kind. I argue that while "creativity" was a central attraction for the students – in promising practice-based skills and culturally productive and collaborative project – it remains a paradox with critical implications on the political economy of education (cf. Robinson, 1999).

Pedagogy and Creativity

Inspired by the rise of the creative industries as an object of public policy (and the political aspirations that animated this rise), HE has become an uncertain beneficiary. Numerous research projects have emerged nation-wide on student skills, employability and the instrumental uses of creativity, and one initial stimulus for a project proposal on urban cultural intermediaries was the ideological co-option of "creativity" into the HE curriculum agenda. Since the New York Times' bestsellers, Anderson and Ray's *The Cultural Creatives* (2000), David Brooks' *Bobos in Paradise* (2000), and Richard Florida's *The Rise of the Creative Class* (2002) – all concurrent with the pervasive influence of creative industries policy and research on local authorities in the UK (Banks, and O'Connor, 2017) – one would be forgiven for assuming that "creativity" remains a pervasive educational trend, a key "doctrine", and even political obligation for education institutions (Schlesinger, 2007; Hewison, 2014). However, while attempts have been made to devise an irresistible skills conspectus for education sector (Skillset, 2011), a survey of education policy landscape reveals a lack of strategic integration of creativity and education at all levels.

While researchers can proclaim that "Creativity is one of the important skills of the twenty-first century and central to higher education" (Jahnke, Haertelb and Wildt, 2017: 87), and further refer to significant academic advances in creative pedagogy research (Jackson, N., Oliver, M., Shaw, M. and Wisdom, eds. 2007), there nonetheless remains a paucity of survey knowledge on creativity and HE (Egana, Maguirea, Christophers, Rooney, 2017; Soriano de

Alencar and Freire de Oliveira, 2016), not least considering the continuing methodological challenges in identifying the "creative" in an educational context (Fischera, Ogetb, Cavalluccib, 2016). In relation to the putative creative urban economy, more substantive developments are to be found in the educational discourse of "public engagement" (largely on the part of the major UK universities), where students have been strategically positioned as "change agents" and "co-producers" of local community (Dunne, E. and Zandstra, 2011; Hillier, 2013; Kay, Dunne and Hutchinson, 2010; McCulloch, 2009; NUS/QAA, 2012). The public engagement discourse, however, is heavily defined by institutional priorities, public relations and established models of altruism and charity for the most part unrelated to creativity *per se*.

The rise of creative industries research has arguably provoked more established areas of cultural research (cultural studies; cultural policy studies, and so on) to consider creativity in terms of labour, production and economy, as well as excavating older sociologies of culture to define culture as a mechanism of social reproduction. Pierre Bourdieu's reconceptualisation of culture as a nexus of capital is now taken as a "given" in contemporary cultural research (Bourdieu, 1984; 1993), and so creativity is widely understood in terms of the "presentation and representation" of symbolic goods and services (Bourdieu, 1984: 359) as well as their production. From Florida (2002) to NESTA (2008), creativity has increasingly wrested from an exclusive association with the arts, or historic sphere of culture (and so from individual genius or psychological traits: Bilton, 2010); it is routinely defined more broadly in terms of industrial production, animated by specific technical applications of broader knowledge-based skills (Florida, 2002: Higgs, Cunningham and Bakhshi, 2008).

Decades ago, Howard Becker then Paul DiMaggio re-defined the study of art itself in terms of production and organisations — not great individuals and their individual works of art (Becker 1974; Powell and DiMaggio 1983). One of Becker's original arguments involved the observation that even individual artists maintain a supply chain, and supply chains are value-embedded and indicative of a range of social, institutional and economic conditions (Becker

1974: 774-775). Understanding creativity as internal to the economics of cultural production allows us to understand the material conditions of culture (labour, the social conditions and economy of labour, the urban locations of labour) as much as the collective and collaborative process-based contexts that collaborative methods – and consequently for the project, cognitive approaches to engaging with the City (O'Connor, 2015). In this general framework, the role of “intermediaries” indicate an expansion of “services” within industrial production, and so also indicates the extent to which contemporary creativity is an integral to consumer experiences and patterns of consumption as much as chains of supply and value, social networks of endorsement and validation, and all interconnected with media communications. Where using “intermediaries” as a project concept allowed us to divest creativity of its artistic mystique (and the kinds of celebratory individualism that many international students, in any case, find perplexing) it nonetheless admits an explicit promise of “skills”-based learning.

Historically, three major paradigms of HE as they have evolved in the UK can be understood with reference to the Robbins Committee report (1963), the Dearing Report (1997) and the recent Higher Education and Research Act 2017. Broadly, Robbins defined education as a social good whereas Dearing was concerned with its direct role in economic growth. The Higher Education and Research Act 2017, while maintaining Dearing’s concern with economy (and industry-useful skills), radically shifted the priority from students (as individuals with developing skills) to the political regulation of institutions (re-defined as “education service providers”, whose role is, in part, directing and validating skills). The frameworks of skills development today (the curriculum, teaching methods, institutional facilities, and so on) are now regulated and arguably subject to a political management of quasi-consumer contracts between students *en masse* and “providers” (which is usually a university, but legally could admit an ITC corporation). For the new Act 2017, the academic skills so cultivated must be prescient to current trends and forecasting in economic development, and not simply reflective of current market demands. While instrumentalist in one sense, it is nuanced and where an enduring (post-Dearing) assumption on the need for skills remains, the academic

practices of knowledge formation (research, analysis, debate and communication, and so on) are not, within its concept of the general economy, arguably adequate or sufficient in "equipping" a student for this economy (Guillaumier, 2016; Lim, 2016). Unlike Dearing, the current skills provision assumed by the 2017 Act are not a product of the tutor-student relationship (or primarily manifest in unique expression, style and a particular facility for adapting to – and hopefully, provoking – change). Rather, skills are now the measurable, procedural commodified units of ability, imparted and validated by the brand of a future growth-orientated education-providing corporation.

Perhaps because of this tacit redefinition of skills – as expressive of the student-corporation relation, not the tutor-student relation – and as noted above (re: Skillset, 2011), it is less of a mystery why with decades of the skills agenda, and the imperative of the economy in defining skills, the pedagogic profile of "creative" skills has not markedly increased. Indeed, since the global financial crisis (since 2008) a profound ambiguity has emerged on the kinds of skills prospective economic development (local, national, regional or global) might require. Since the European Union's pivotal Lisbon Treaty of 2007 (with the emphasis on unification through employment and economic growth: see also OECD, 2008), the European Year of Creativity and Innovation in 2009, and most recently the EU's 'New Skills Agenda for Europe' [COM(2016) 381], a growing enthusiasm for investing principally in the "knowledge economy" has not resulted in an expanding agenda for creative skills specifically for a creative economy of increasing international credibility (Gaspar and Mabic, 2015). This observation can be supported in part by the Universities UK (the national association of university institutions) and its positioning of "student experience" as the principal vehicle of HE monitoring, evaluation and public validation – not the education-skills nexus per se. While its central report on student experience indeed mentions creativity as a skill (Universities UK, 2016: p.10; p.11., p.16), its preferred tabulation of skill categories for institutional assessment does not (p.16). By implication, the development of skills is now only of value as a part of a continuum of activities of "institutional teaching and learning practice" directed to career outcomes and progressive post-graduation earnings (p.19), both internal to the capacity building of the

education providers corporate brand and questionable speculative thought on the imminent future of the global economy.

Nonetheless, in the Humanities and Social Sciences at least, "creativity" remains a powerful signifier (if always in danger of appropriation: business schools are increasingly appropriating creativity as internal to entrepreneurship). The historical backdrop of Pine and Gilmour's *The Experience Economy* (1999) and of Polanski and Chiapello's *The New Spirit of Capitalism* (2005) form a mirror-image representation of what Florida famously called the "creative age" (Florida and Tinagli, 2004). The former text by business consultants, the latter by social philosophers, together express an era where industrial forces and the development of the human person merges as a set of interests co-opted into economic production. Human subjectivity and its powers of creative imagination are no longer anterior to the socio-legal institutional forces that form social value, and economic reproduction feigns a "humanisation" of industry and employment – absorbing even the cognitive subjective capacities of idiosyncratic individuality. Evidenced by the absorption of once avant-garde art visual idioms into mainstream brand and advertising, the commodification of street style and Indie pop music, students are invariably excited and personally invested in the production of "skills" relating to creativity. Moreover, the labour market is so pervasively presented as a colourful expanse of creative opportunity, co-extensive with leisure and play, and so of profound personal development and fulfilment. In an age where universities are effectively competing global corporate brands, charting the development and outcomes of student skills is an increasing part of performance management and evidence for corporate legitimacy. Creativity itself remains on the margins of corporate pedagogic investment; it has not been fully co-opted, for reasons we will explore.

Students and the City

The 'Culture and Social Innovation' module benefitted from an innovative internal funding agency, IATL, run by creative practitioners working with an enabling meta-framework of criteria: 'Interdisciplinarity, Inclusiveness, Internationalisation', 'Diversity', 'Student Leadership', 'Open space Learning', 'Student as Researcher'.

An urban-based project aiming for civic impact was not difficult to cohere with these criteria, and without jeopardising any potential outcome. Even so, promoting teaching in an environment weighed towards research demands a framework that delivers added-value to the academics involved and not just the students; the older “pedagogy as a public duty” ethos has steadily drained away from even well-meaning faculty members. Such a situation (for those who maintain the duty as a political, not merely public, commitment) can generate a demand for a deconstruction of the binary of “teaching—research” that so determines the current professional academic division of labour. That is, one can set up a project whereby research in an urban context offers students a spectrum of both creative experiences, social opportunities and skills while also contributing to a scholarly expansion of exploratory methodologies and so avenues of research. The rationale for an “urban cultural intermediaries” project was that a practice-based, creative engagement with the urban culture of the City (the City of Coventry) could generate creative skills pertinent to the City’s embryonic creative economy. This was a critical, not instrumental project, insofar as it aimed to increase the citizen (or civic)-consciousness of the students, and generate an avenue of cultural policy research for the tutors.

The term “intermediary” is now a familiar one in creative industries research (Maguire and Matthews, 2014, following Bourdieu, 1984), and serves to identify how activities not intrinsic to creativity are required for cultural production in a market economy (in the case of this project, for research, strategy and planning, project management and also marketing and communications). The intermediary, it must be said, may also be defined in terms catalyst, provocateur or instigator, for example, generating public debate and criticism and so prepare an active audience to engage with the forthcoming creative outputs.

An initial motive for an urban cultural engagement was an invitation to register the outputs (two cultural events) with City’s Positive Images Festival, a public festival principally supported by the City (municipal) Council and celebrating the City’s diverse public culture. Coventry is a third-tier post-industrial City of 300,000 inhabitants, and has not recovered from industrial decline as the once national centre for engineering and manufacturing design (notably, Daimler, Rolls Royce,

Jaguar, Triumph motorbikes, among other luminaries of industry). Immigrants were initially attracted by the huge industrial factory labour force, but continued through the industrial decline of the 1970s and 1980s, making the City the most culturally diverse in the UK. The Positive Images Festival was established as a response to this rise in the 1980s and is noted as one of the largest festivals of multiculturalism in Europe. Yet, the cultural sector of the City has remained relatively small and reflects other policy priorities, notably economic development through retail and competitive office facilities with low rental values. Cheap property has only marginally benefited the cultural life of the City, but has motivated a policy-orientation towards commercial property and the now huge lettings market of student accommodation, currently dominating the City's skyline. Only a concerted cultural lobby in the City has provoked a limited re-industrialisation through creative industries and other innovation-based small business enterprise. Coventry University has to some extent invested in this, but, as most universities, largely on the short-term research project-funding basis.

In the autumn of 2016, the City submitted a winning bid for the UK City of Culture 2021 accolade, in part because of an evolving research project that was to deliver the Cultural Strategy 2017-27, a collaboration between the two universities and the City Council (Willcocks, 2016; Dixon, A. et. al. 2017). The significance of this was that "culture" had become a political imperative, placing an obligation on City institutions, and to a limited extent its main corporations, to engage in partnerships or contribute to the publicly stated aims to make the City into a "City of culture". However, a critical observation on this seemingly favourable emerging policy environment will note three counter-developments: first, the "official" impetus along with a flurry of small grants stimulated a range of immediate alliances, arguably a product of policy-manufactured aspiration and not actual sustainable creative collaboration; second, hierarchies of professional priority inevitably emerged, where student projects did not feature favourably; thirdly, the time-horizon inevitably imposed by the imminent national event made longer-term sustainable thinking (not least critical consideration of serious structural problems and the failing of the City) politically disadvantageous. Taking the question of pedagogy out of an institutional framework (of the universities) and into the civic sphere of the City's urban culture, remains a matter of policy

theory as much as an enduring policy challenge. Is the enduring question on the relation between "students and the City" (Chatterton, 2010; Universities UK, 2010; Chatterton, 2000) a substantive policy problem at all?

The historic "students and the City" (or "town and gown") dilemma has largely been supplanted by a celebratory policy discourse of economic prosperity and employment through university partnerships in regional economic development, or the more adventurous aspirations for "leadership and management of place" (Gibson, 2015; Lambert, 2015). For the project's preliminary research, on its own assumptions, it seemed an empirical "given" that the City's student population of 50,000 possesses creative potential and talent, but equally there is no creative economy policy framework that could enable the transformative benefit of this to the City to be registered or directed. The City's students are not, *en masse*, culturally active (according to available arts venue data on volunteering and attendance), and it is a leap of imagination to assert that a City could activate its own political will to integrate a mass student population into its cultural sector. It is more the case that the current financial settlement of 50,000 transient student consumers, many of whom live on a short term, premium level, rental basis, attracts widespread policy approval. One preliminary research assumption was that students as a social category are increasingly "positioned" in the economy as consumers, not producers. However, this only served to identify a largely neglected research question on the role of the university itself as institutional actor in urban economy – and the mystifying lack of cultural (or any other) policies for interconnecting HE institutions to the broader civic landscape (that is, beyond careers, internships and volunteering programmes: Schwartzman, 1995).

Another formative assumption of the project was that the City seemed to "lose" most of its graduate population, while other regional cities (Nottingham, Leicester, Birmingham) benefitted from their longer residency and creative entrepreneurialism (the putative post-student "start-up" and enterprise culture). Phrasing this as a research question was difficult given the macro-economic scale of the urban research that would be required. Of more practical use was the observational remarks generated from preliminary interviews, where 100 campus-based students were subject to a student-conducted attitude survey,

followed by in-depth (elite) interviews held with five experienced City cultural actors.

Responses from campus-based students confirmed a further self-evident observation, that the urban development of the modern university campus has socio-cultural implications for the City's own urban economy. An environment so convenient and self-sufficient (with supermarkets, banks, a major arts centre, students union facilities and entertainment, restaurants, pub and multiple cafes, and so on) – the incentives for ever leaving it were weak. By contrast, the City was described as both "dull" and "dangerous", and the predominance of international students on visa restrictions reinforced a sense that the campus was a transient place without any interconnection with the City at all. Further questioning revealed that attitudes to the City were impressionistic and often rumour-based (the City is "dangerous", and so on) and incentives to visit it were largely based on the desire for transaction (what it "offers" in terms of retail, entertainment and leisure).

The in-depth elite interviews more specifically identified the material conditions by which indifference to the City was cultivated: the following five-point summary of findings were useful.

1: "Creative economy" is not a useful term for smaller cities, where the creative industries are small or depleted, where only a small "arts sector" advocates for cultural policies in the City and most corporate and institutional actors "buy" their creative services from London or elsewhere.

2: The City's large student population are not, in fact, an object of policy, beyond institutional recruitment and economic data. Framing students in social or cultural terms is only conducted *ad hoc* by universities for specific research projects and not by local authority policy research; social or cultural participation tends only to be through student individual motivation, with no broader framework of value, or validation.

3: Given the dispersal of governance and policy making in UK cities, central local authorities have limited capacity for research and strategic development in any case; moreover, policy is an increasingly weak and limited mechanism public intervention. A critical mass of strong, small, flexible creative organisations would

be more effective in determining the shape of an urban creative economy [a Government-sponsored regional industrial strategy, in some way recognising this, was not published until mid-2018].

4: Students are an increasingly international and diverse category, not homogenous and exhibiting little collective characteristics or inclinations (least of all political activism as in past times). International students, moreover, operate within an increasingly limited visa regime, and uninformed of the precise boundaries (civil, political or even human rights) in a foreign country.

5: Cultural participation is not a systematic aim of HE institutions, or at least, only stimulated on a project-basis, or traditional volunteering, industrial placements and internships. HE institution policies extend only to these areas, other than matters of behaviours and conduct in the City (i.e. disciplinary policies).

The content of the preliminary interviews offered a critical orientation for the project's revision of the module – summarised in relation to the above points as follows:

(a): The “creative”, in its over-association with “economy” (of industries and business organisation), has arguably detracted from the social importance of community and participatory cultural production, particularly social sub-cultural or activist-based organisation. As a model of strategic pedagogy, the project therefore aimed for the production of research knowledge as a cultural intervention in public debates on the City's cultural priorities, not least a working corrective to the influential policy assumptions derived from Florida's 'Creative Class' notion (positioning students as bearers of 'talent' and so future service providers: Florida, 2002).

(b): The rationale for the project's research on mobile creativity was a critique of the exclusionary parameters of civic cultural policies as much as validating an international students contribution to the City's culture. The emerging research exhibition was used to form a policy statement on the absence of the City's mobile population, demanding that students (as distinct from their institutions) become the objects of policy (and not, as now, objectified by the policies of their institution, as in say, a mass of fee-paying customers).

(c): In the absence of policy, the project demonstrated how an assertion of political will through creativity or cultural activity, generates solidarity: the project opened a range of possibilities for partnership and collaboration with arts, media and cultural organisations across the City.

(d): The rise of the international student population, where students are categorised as “migrants” and subject to migrant regulation, a clearer defence and delineation of their rights and powers of participation are required.

(e): Where explicit policies on student freedoms and empowerment remain absent, innovative pedagogy remains one of the few means of impressing on an institution the need for such.

Strategic Pedagogy

After weeks of surveying the social complexity of the City, the object of "mobile" people more effectively presented *itself*. Being both enclosed and neglected, the City Arcade shopping area was attractive to the homeless, who were also ethnically more diverse than first appeared. Indeed many foreign-born homeless persons offered to contribute the various belongings they carried with them – from clothing to mementoes and even instruments, of their homeland and subsequent journey. The students, many of whom from countries where homelessness, if it exists, is not so visible, were fascinated by the notion of “home-less” as a *cultural* phenomenon – and how mobility can put one on the outside of policies for culture (which are heavily invested in origins, residency, citizenship and education). The student's exhibition was constructed as a traditional English "living room", where the typical furniture was borrowed from various places including charity shops who aid the homeless, and where the framed photos, music, TV and other living room features were borrowed from actual homeless people (opening the viewer to the less-common phenomenon of homelessness in a foreign culture: a homelessness as cultural exile or refugee status). The exhibition was called *Welcome Home*.

The approach taken was improvised, using three otherwise undeveloped exploratory methods in urban research: 'cultural mapping', 'photourbanism', and 'curating the City' (three areas of improvised methodology for which there

are, arguably, no dominant models of method). Students were briefed (in dialogue with artist contributors) then left to work out ways of synthesising the research material gathered.

Cultural mapping (more conventionally called 'cultural resource mapping') is often used as an empirical audit tool and means of generating basic statistics on the economic dynamics of a City's cultural infrastructure (spatial distribution, concentration and direction of resources, and the activities for which they provide, and so on). More relevant is how this can provide a framework for understanding the cultural-political geography of the City – the relation between spaces, places and organisations, audiences and communities and how culture and the creative economy uses (or is used within) the space of the City. In the hands of the students, cultural mapping bypassed more familiar cultural sociology and economic geography-informed approaches to the cultural landscape, and provoked an exploration of the phenomenology of cultural space in the City and the social dynamics of interaction and participation as experienced (or not) by "mobile" people. The students (mostly international) were particularly interested in how the spaces of culture in the City were detached, heavily regulated, and less accessible to mobile people than the "private" space of shopping mall, cafes or the open streets themselves.

Cultural mapping was therefore used to explore various means of expressing and representing urban culture – not as a seamless experience of the cultural infrastructure of the City, but as an antagonistic relation between the informal and formal, street and institution, the "cultured" and everyone else. Despite the popularity of Creative City discourses (as well as academic Urban Studies), the students found few research resources on the mapping of the informal cultural economy, and the consequently fragmentary attempts at mapping through visual representation (and expression) informed the second exploratory method, *photourbanism*. Photourbanism begins with the use of visual devices, (principally the smart phone, camera or video), but also collates visual representations of the City as distributed throughout the City (the City's representation of itself, like maps or tourist publicity). Altogether,

this material was gathered and articulated the social and cultural dynamics of the City's semiotic register and how the embedded aesthetic values signified therein could convey public or political will (to include, create, preserve, neglect or exploit, and so on). During the project, while numerous photographs and a short video film were used, the students awarded them a lesser role in the exhibition – in relation to donated or "found" objects.

The method-area *curating the City* is a means of collating signifiers of a City's material culture, where objects are cast as agents of meaning. The City is therefore refracted through the objects that inhabit its urban space, as exhibition "readymades" in the form of donated mementoes or personal belongings, which embody and emit memory, narrative and identity (even debris or discarded items, but particularly the non-essential objects of meaning carried by displaced, travelling or re-located persons). More significantly, was the "creativity" exhibited by homeless people, in learning how to communicate and survive on the streets – by playing guitar and busking, by carrying photographs as evidence of origin and identity, by using materials and found clothing as protection, camouflage and insulation; and so on.

These three exploratory methods together formed an experimental methodology of mobile creativity inasmuch as they were open-ended, not institutionally recognised (as academic methods) and not prescriptive in terms of the "data" or material they would make available. More importantly, the exhibition (as an activity of curatorial selection and composition) offered a critical space where a reflection on, and even a total rejection of, the material gathered could be possible. In the event, the material opened more avenues for research than were practical, but did serve to demand an aesthetic, as well as social, engagement with the site and place of the City as field of research – something international students later testified to have been memorable as it was valuable (as much social as academic development for them individually).

The exhibition served to make visible the "mobile" people of the City, as a

cultural phenomenon yet not empower by policy (the City's official cultural resources) so as to activate their knowledge and experience in contexts of cultural production. While interview material, statements and video recordings generated more research data than could be assessed or subject to a visually significant interpretation, the exhibition was visited by 200 visitors all of whom expressed a degree of cognisance of issues conveyed. The exhibition became a "home" of homelessness, social dislocation and cultural alienation where "creativity" could be identified on the exterior of the cultural economy of the City.

While the exhibition was an exhilarating experience for the student group, they remained voicing questions. The research process was not the magical mystery tour of "creativity" they had imagined; they professed to have been exhausted by the social complexity and "politics" of culture – where commonly advertised invitations to participation were forthcoming from a highly institutionalised and socially selective range of arts organisations and an even smaller range of commercial creative industries who attention was virtually impossible to secure. Ten contributing tutors (six artists, two curators and two academics) had delivered talks on a range of cognate subjects (urban space, social community, public culture, informal economy and street-life, consumption, culture and social behaviour), yet could not maintain synchronicity with exploratory research in an unpredictable (and uncooperative) environment. A further structural complexity was generated by the assumptions embedded in the project brief and outline, inevitably animated by the tutor's preferred phraseology. Terms like "cultural discourse" and "cultural intervention", while obvious to some, were contested by contributing artists. A "project vocabulary" was devised and disseminated, which included key definitions as anticipated by the project, and transparent about the tutor's own intellectual agenda as well as how the open-ended research exploration interconnected with post-module research opportunities for others. The shared lexicon was used more productively for argument and not simply consensus, and contributing artists were happy to agree on the observation that the City's emergent cultural discourse was inadvertently defining a "public" in "territorial" ways (i.e. not admitting mobile people). The aim for a "cultural intervention", however, provoked scepticism, given the "real" politics of the urban

economy and its formation through the nexus of land-based capital and property ownership.

Given the early scepticism of contributing artists to this initial project aim (perhaps an expression of their own marginal role in the cultural economy), a concurrent schedule of public events was organised. These events attempted to gain visibility for the project, the first achievement of which was to be admitted to the programme of the City's Positive Images Festival. As this took place at the project's final weeks, a series of three earlier public events were held during the project.

The first event was called 'Right to the City', on the subject of the now global movement for urban democracy (which, it must be said, has had so little influence in the UK). The event hoped to stimulate a sense that culture in relation to the City is also a framework of necessary activism, and with ten largely City-based speakers, it generated a range of critical reflections on the City's cultural governance – notably how the cultural sector and creative industries are entirely disconnected, but even on their own do little to facilitate urban democracy and democratic participation in the City.

The second event was aimed specifically at young entrepreneurs and called 'Students, the City, the Creative and Cultural Industries'. Held at the new creative industries location in the east of the City, Fargo Village, the ensuing discussion generated three main and salient concerns the students found particularly pertinent (as it was coextensive with the project's preliminary research): the views offered can be summarised as follows: (i) historically, the City was animated by youth sub-cultures, which were culturally productive (largely in pop music) and also politically active (in Coventry, against the Far-Right); however, this emerged in a spontaneous and dynamic way, for which the social conditions no longer exists, and cultural space in the City is now institutionally enclosed or managed according to the logic of retail and consumption. Can cultural policies, therefore, simulate the social conditions for new sub-cultural formations of cultural production and activism? How can the City's young people direct their need (serious need in the face of student debt) for employment, towards a

cultural production that is both commercial and activist? (ii) While the City is arguably not subject to gentrification, given its lack of economic development, the cost or pricing structures of public (and cultural) spaces in the City are mirroring commercial industries, but more emphatically, more and more contingent upon membership or subscription mechanisms, whose level of payment is prohibitive to broader and spontaneous cultural participation; the boundaries between those "inside" and "outside" of the cultural arena have become stronger. (iii) The political economy of the City is opaque: there is little available public information on the rights and opportunities for young people to become involved in decision making, start an enterprise, engage in cultural policy decision making, or where cultural institutions facilitate political participation, even if only defending culture from a commercial property-driven political economy.

Lastly featured was a "City Culture Forum". As a symbolic gesture towards a non-existent 'cultural public sphere' in the City, the Forum attempted to simulate a critical focus on "the City" (that is, in the absence of a cultural forum where the City's cultural actors do not speak from within the framework of their own strategic interests, but as citizens of the City of Coventry). Even with a media partner responsible for marketing, the audience only represented the City in fragmentary fashion albeit the event experienced a lecture by a noted urbanist on how the radical vision for post-War Coventry reconstruction should again inspire the City's new cultural epoch. To date, an annual public forum is planned and aims to be a moment of critical reflection in the City's cultural calendar – and more importantly a collective momentum for a policy intervention yet to be found.

Given the project's broader aims, the use of public events allowed the students some degree of research opportunity through networking, gaining immediate feedback or advice, and also creating an audience of cultural participants for the final events. The experience of these events on the part of the student group, however, was interesting, if not critically significant: they expected gatherings of the City's cultural actors to be profoundly creative events, or at least where radically alternative and inventive expressions of thought and value were to be had. Instead, they encountered on-going discussions pervaded with questions of funding and economics, administration and management, the City Council and

bureaucratic policy making. This only added to their growing suspicion that "creativity" was not, in fact, a substantive feature of the cultural economy – at least outside of the limited confines of art production.

The creative process, using teamwork with a group of otherwise untrained and non-specialist students, can be frustrating for students, and cultural diversity (students from very different cultures and countries) can generate forms of conflict for which skills-based pedagogy is ill equipped to address (de Villiers Scheepers, 2015). What form of creative outputs, then, do we expect of students – professional level outputs? Amateur outputs? "Have a go" approaches to specialist areas of cultural production or industry by untrained students generates disillusion, and by what criteria of assessment is such work evaluated? Survey-level pedagogic research in the use of creativity across student cohorts in various disciplines is not forthcoming from the scholarly community, and the "politics" of creative pedagogy in the City is yet to find a range of interested stakeholders. What remains troubling for students is that cultural sector organisations are largely concerned only with creativity as internal to artistic production (usually professional and highly selective), and the creative industries remain open only for formal internship and placement roles (if at all). Yet, "creativity" and the promise of creative skills development, holds a unique attraction for students.

Concluding remarks

This article offered a series of critical reflections on a new (revised) course module aiming for a creative project with civic impact. Initially the "civic impact" was envisaged (idealistically) in terms of an inclusive format (a module creating a space for cultural participation in the City) and extensive field research on the "outsiders" of policy (or the "mobile creatives"). However, students formed their own order of priorities, which were less the "social" oriented research aims than developing creative skills relevant to the cultural and creative industries. The promise of "creative practice" was central to their enrolment rationale, and as discussed above, this raised theoretical questions for the tutor on the enduring paradox of creativity – the creative process, outside defined genres of artistic practice, does not easily generate

measurable skills, which in turn map onto career pathways in industry. While the skills internal to exploratory field research methodologies (curating and exhibition, hosting a public debate, project evaluation) are obviously beneficial in terms of learning outcomes, their role in the cultural and creative industries remains an open question, and one the contemporary corporate university is not eager to explore. Conceptualising the student's role in terms of "cultural intermediaries" provided a theoretical rationale for this open question, albeit only partially convinced the students that their investment in practical work was of any tangible value.

A more basic pedagogic complexity was the exploratory dimension of creative activity – where outcomes and even outputs cannot (or should not) be proscribed in advance. Where module recruitment and enrolment is increasingly conducted on a market-basis (the content of a module, as any product or service, must be defined and "sold" in advance), modules with a dynamic and evolving content can present an unacceptable level of "risk", given the range of potential variables in a creative learning process. Theoretically, a question mark must remain on the potential ways in which creativity collapses into what Aristotle famously called *technê* (artisan-based skill), because of the need for both an explicit identification of creativity with industry and the demand that any module must guarantee an outcome already defined in terms of the statutory module learning aims – the basis on which the student, contractually, agrees to undertake the module.

To a significant degree, the project intersected with a growing political agenda on culture in civic development, and some of whose aims (inclusion for civic pedagogy, and policy intervention) emerged as research options, not pedagogic ones. The resulting exhibition was on its own terms successful in that it featured an engaging, coherent if not poignant response to homelessness (as a cultural, not social, phenomenon). Nonetheless, it was the project's pedagogic process (and preliminary research) that generated the substantive research issues. And these issues were "negative" in their theoretical complexion – they revealed not only the material conditions for a "role" for students in a putative developing creative economy were not there,

but that institutional and corporate interests pertained to their continued absence. Despite the huge corporate wealth and property expansion of universities, there is no collaborative project and workspace outside of prescribed institutional direction; there is no institutional facilitation that would allow students a connection with the City's cultural sector and its professional networks; and despite an evolving cultural agenda, it did not address institutional power and far more powerful agendas governing the space of the City (corporate office development and so forth). Altogether the lack of public participation in policy agendas generate a compounded sense that the City is not a place of common interests and a shared future, starting with our student years.

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